



"Behāfarīdism"

Persian religion that arose at the end of the Umayyads and was destroyed at the beginning of the Abbasids

Origin and Formation

The domination of the Persian element and its pervasiveness within the Abbasid state cannot be separated from the tolerance of the Abbasid caliphs themselves in that matter. They found in the Persians helpers and assistants and placed them in the position of the sons of the conquering Arabs, who settled in Iraq, the Levant and other countries that were conquered at the beginning of the Islamic era. That was an Abbasid option dearly paid later on.

There is no convincing reason for the Abbasids to do so as the Arab state, at the outset of Islam and the Umayyads, had passed the first one hundred years of its life and gained a lot of administrative, financial and knowledge experiences. However, the Abbasid caliphs, in most of them, enabled the Persians and their Zoroastrian religious culture to penetrate the body of the state until it fragmented it culturally and conquered it militarily.

From its inception, the Abbasid state welcomed the Persian element in administration and government, opened doors for them and raised their ranks, and the Persians had a wide and active presence in Baghdad, the capital, and left deep influences in various fields.

This influence was not limited to taking the bureaucratic experiences and administrative formations from the Persians, but rather included many professions and functions. After the Abbasid government made Baghdad its capital, Iraq was significantly impacted by various cultural, civilizational, and Persian fields. Iranian arts and professions spread therein, such as writing in Persian, knitting, sewing and taste in the Persian style.

When Iraq became an important center of the Islamic state and Baghdad became the capital of the state, a center for its decision-making and an important rule of governance, many Iranian craftsmen and professionals were allowed to migrate thereto.

Persian presence entered its religion and culture

The presence of the Persians in the Abbasid government had very significant impacts on the Abbasid administration. That was evident after they took over the administrative affairs and expanded the scope of their work in the state. Iranian crafts and professions appeared in Iraq that were not known before. This is most evidenced by the subsequent influence of the Barmakids in Abbasid state.

Researchers Ali Asghar Mirzaei and Abd al-Salam Balawi said in their book, titled The Transfer of Iranian Professions and Industries to Iraq in Abbasid Era: A Study in the Causes and Methods of Transfer, that "The penetration of the Persian element into the Abbasid government since its inception had a great impact as the Persians left a great mark for themselves in the interest of the Abbasid caliphs and their statesmen in Persian culture, up to celebrating Nowruz and Mehregan, which are two of the Persian religious feasts. Celebration of these two feasts continued during the third and fourth centuries after the migration. The Buyids had a prominent influence in Iraqi society, especially with regard to religious ceremonies in their era, as they were keen to show the details of their culture".

Civilization Alienation

The Persian presence, with the approval of the Abbasids, was overwhelming and it moved from the administration to Persian clothing and textiles. The Abbasids replaced the authentic Arab dress with the Persian one and Persian fashion appeared in the Abbasid court. Pants and vaults were worn, as well as the talisan, which is one of the most famous Persian clothes; a round garment that is placed over the head and hangs over the forehead.

Arab foods were not spared from the entry of the Persian. Persian cuisine spread in the palaces of the state and became the favorite with the change of the Arab taste.

Early Appearance of the Persian Magi

The Umayyad state had just fallen when the fangs of the Magi Persians appeared, those who worked in silence to get out and re-establish their religion and their Sasanian kingdom, which had fallen at the hands of the Arab knights. With the weakness of the Umayyad state and its laxity, and with the emergence of the Abbasid call, the hopes of the Persians came out to the open again. This prompted great hopes in the hearts of the Persian separatists. If they supported the Abbasid call, they would be able to restore their position and their religion, thus some teachings of Magian religions (Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Mazdakism) appeared again in those regions, sometimes dressed in the garment of Islam. In other words, these teachings are developed from those religions after being influenced by some of the teachings of Islam and after the success of the call and the establishment of the state, as well as the declaration of the Abbasids' adherence to the Islamic religion and their adoption of Quran and Sunnah, not to mention their reliance on Arab elements, at the beginning of the Caliphate. Those Persian elements made rebellious movements against the Abbasids, in an attempt to restore their past glory and end Arab rule in those regions.

Persian Behāfarīd Movement (749-747 AD):

Behāfarīdism movement is the oldest political religious movement that emerged in Khorasan, east of the Abbasid state, at the end of the Umayyad era and during the activity of the Abbasid call there. They continued after the establishment of the Abbasid state. Behāfarīdism was founded by a man called Bahafarid bin Ferdinan, from the village of Rowa in Abershahr. He was a Zoroastrian Magi who tried to spoil some of the teachings of Islam, including that he used to pray the five daily prayers without prostration (sujood) and without facing the qiblah.

A historical narration states that before announcing himself he went to China only to return bringing with him a green, soft, fine-made shirt. Upon reaching his country in Khorasan, he climbed at night to the dome of one of the temples without anyone seeing him. One of the peasants saw him at dawn, then the people gathered around him. He told them that he had come from heaven, where he saw heaven and hell and that Allah had given him that strange shirt that was in heaven. Behāfarīd moved in Nishapur before the announcement of the Abbasid call in Ramadan (129 AH), corresponding to (747 AD).

Behāfarīd claimed prophecy and showed them a book in Persian language that he claimed had been revealed to. He then called for a modified type of Magian Zoroastrianism and claimed to be the successor of Zoroaster, who admitted that he was a prophet, yet he rejected some of the teachings of Zoroastrianism and introduced some basic modifications in Zoroaster's religion in accordance with the principles of Islam and his teachings. Among his new teachings, as said, that he commanded his companions to quit talking with a low voice while eating, as well as to stop drinking alcohol and eating dead meat, in addition to quitting marrying mothers, daughters, sisters and nieces. These matters are not forbidden in the Zoroastrian teachings, yet he adopted prohibiting them from the teachings of Islam. However, he ordered his followers to prostrate to the eye of the sun on one knee!

Behāfarīd also imposed on his companions seven prayers: The first is for the monotheism of Allah, while Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion. The second prayer is for creation of the heavens and the earth. The third is for the creation of animals and their means of living. The fourth is for death. The fifth is for resurrection and reckoning. The sixth is for the paradise and hell. The seventh is for glorifying the people of paradise.

Perhaps one of his most important teachings that was later leaked is the resurrection as he called for (the Return "Raj'a" Doctrine). Perhaps that was his most important principles, signifying that a person does not die, but rather hides somewhere and that if he dies, he will return to this world before the Day of Judgment.

Elimination of the first Persian rebellious movements

Most sources agree that the extremist movement was eliminated during the time of Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah, the first of the Abbasid caliphs. The magi themselves resisted Behāfarīd movement and considered him a dissident. The Moabatha and the Haradha (Magi clerics) met with Abu Muslim in Nishapur and complained to him that Behāfarīd had corrupted the religion of Islam. Abu Muslim sent Shabib bin Dah and Abdullah bin Saeed to ask him to join Islam. He agreed and was declared a master, yet his conversion to Islam was not accepted due to his predictions and he was killed.

His teachings spread in Khorasan, especially after the death of Abu Muslim al-Khurasani, until the fourth century AH / tenth century AD. Perhaps the steadfastness of Behāfarīdism's followers in their beliefs is partly due to their belief in the inevitability of Behāfarīd's return, as his followers believe that he ascended to heaven on a horse and that he will return to earth to take revenge on his enemies.

The religion that Behāfarīdi al-Farsi brought is a mixture of Islamic and Zoroastrian teachings

References:

- 1) Hussein Atwan, Abbasid Call: History and Development, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dar Al-Jil, 1995).
- 2) Sayyid Salem, First Abbasid Era (Alexandria: University Youth Foundation, 1993).
- 3) Ali Mirzaei and Abd al-Salam Balawi, Transfer of Iranian Professions and Industries to Iraq in Abbasid Era (Iran: Arak University, n.d).
- 4) Muhammad Al-Khudari, Lectures on the History of Islamic Nations: The Abbasid State, edited by Muhammad Al-Othmani (Beirut: Dar Al-Qalam, 1986).
- 5) Nabila Hassan, History of the Abbasid State (Alexandria: Dar Al-Ma'rafa Al-Jamieya, 1993).